

FACT SHEET | Expanding Early Childhood Access and Choice

An Opportunity Agenda for a Better Minnesota

Under the leadership of Governor Dayton, Minnesota has made historic investments in giving more kids a great start, securing all-day Kindergarten across the state, investing in early learning scholarships, and beginning to offer voluntary preK to Minnesota families through new funding for school districts around the state. Thanks to Minnesota's efforts, [the state secured an "A" ranking](#) for "early foundations" in a national survey of states' education policies. These early learning opportunities help close the achievement gap, and expand opportunities for economic success to families across Minnesota. This year, Governor Dayton is proposing to build on these investments with an all-the-above approach for early childhood opportunity and success, by expanding voluntary preK while continuing scholarships, making childcare more affordable, and supporting strong families at home.

Expanding Early Learning Opportunity

- **Expanding Voluntary PreK** – Last year, Governor Dayton secured a historic investment to offer free, voluntary preschool at Minnesota school districts. That \$25 million investment allowed 74 school districts across the state to offer this opportunity to Minnesota families, but more than twice that many schools applied. Every family ought to have the opportunity to give their kids the best start – that's why Governor Dayton is calling for \$175 million to expand voluntary preK for Minnesota families. Voluntary preschool options are especially important in Greater Minnesota, where transportation challenges make accessing other early education and child care options difficult for Minnesota families.
- **Making Child Care More Affordable** – Minnesota's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) provides financial assistance to help low-income working families pay for child care. This funding makes a profound difference for parents and their children – allowing parents to pursue education or work, while helping Minnesota kids access high-quality child care. Governor Dayton's Opportunity Agenda includes \$69 million to increase provider payment rates and remove red tape for families and providers. These investments would result in more stable assistance for families and increase the number of child care providers who participate in the program, improving care for more than 30,000 children from low-income families, especially in Greater Minnesota. Right now, only 33,000 Minnesota families have access to tax credits for child care, which costs Minnesota families over \$10,000 per year for each child, on average – some of the highest costs in the country. Governor Dayton wants to expand access to these tax credits to a total of 95,000 Minnesota families, providing \$58 million in tax cuts and giving more child care choices to more Minnesota families. 75,000 families would save an additional \$379 per year.
- **Strong Families, Strong Futures** – To help parents and their newborns get off to a strong start, the Governor is proposing a \$31 million investment in the Department of Health's highly effective Home Visiting Program, which helps the parents of at-risk children develop the skills they need to care for their child. These programs increase graduation rates, decrease incarceration rates, improve school readiness, and support children's health, giving every kid and family the opportunity to start strong and succeed in life.
- **Help Me Grow Initiative** – Governor Dayton's budget invests \$3 million in the Help Me Grow initiative, which provides critical child development information to parents and childcare providers. The program helps identify young children with developmental and emotional concerns to connect them with appropriate services, and give them a great start in school and life.
- **Homework Starts with Home** – Approximately 167,000 Minnesota households with children face housing instability. Research shows that homeless and mobile children are more likely to be absent from school, perform worse on math and reading tests, and eventually drop out. Through the Homework Starts with Home program, the Dayton Opportunity Agenda includes \$6 million to provide rental assistance to Minnesota families with children to ensure that students have stable housing throughout the school year. Governor Dayton also has proposed a \$2 million investment to reduce homelessness for families with children.

Continuing Essential Early Learning Investments

- **Continuing Early Learning Scholarships** – Minnesota has made significant investments in early learning and voluntary preschool to work towards narrowing achievement gaps. In fact, more than 26,750 early learning scholarships have been funded by Governor Dayton and the Legislature over the last five years to provide more early learners access to preschool statewide. The Governor’s Budget would continue to invest in scholarships, while allowing more Minnesota school districts the opportunity to offer voluntary preK, would help ensure more at-risk children can access high-quality preschool opportunities even earlier.
- **Preparing Students for All-Day Kindergarten** – The Governor and Legislature recently invested in all-day Kindergarten. Already, since its first year of implementation, 99.6 percent of kids in Minnesota are going to Kindergarten all-day – giving them the great start they need to succeed in school. Investing in preschool opportunities for more Minnesota kids will help ensure they arrive at all-day Kindergarten ready to learn and grow.

Essential Opportunities for Everyone

- **World’s Best Workforce** – Minnesota’s success has always depended on our people. But for years, Minnesota has faced persistent achievement gaps between white students and students of color, and students who live in poverty. Research shows that giving kids a great early start is the best strategy to close those gaps, and help all students achieve their greatest potential. If Minnesota is going to continue to grow and thrive, we need everyone to have access to the best opportunities in education and our economy.
- **Investments for the Future** – Leading researchers and economists have found that high-quality early learning programs can yield long-term benefits of as much as \$16 for every \$1 invested. Most of those cost savings are in education, human services, and justice system savings, as well as increased tax revenues.
- **Better Opportunities, Better Outcomes** – Studies have shown that early learning programs have impressive and long-lasting benefits for low-income students, including increased high school graduation and employment rates, and decreased incarceration rates.

Saving Families Money

- **Keeping Money in Families’ Pockets** – Giving families the opportunity to send their four-year-old to preschool would not only give our kids a great start; it would help families too. Pre-Kindergarten programs for all Minnesota students would keep thousands of dollars in families’ pockets every year that are currently going to pay for early learning and child care costs.
- **Climbing Child Care Costs** – Right now, Minnesota is the third-most expensive state in the nation for child care. On average, child care for one four-year-old in Minnesota costs \$922 per month, or \$11,068 per year. Helping parents avoid those costs, while ensuring kids are receiving high-quality learning opportunities, is an investment that will pay off for tens of thousands of Minnesota families.

Expanding Early Learning Opportunity – By the Numbers

55,771	Minnesota five-year-olds now enrolled in all-day Kindergarten
74	School districts were awarded first-of-its-kind funding for voluntary preK last year
3,302	Minnesota four-year-olds who have the opportunity of preK in their school district
109	Minnesota school districts that also applied for the 2016-17 school year, but could not offer this opportunity for Minnesota families due to the limited funding awarded by the legislature
6,837	Four-year-olds at those districts who did not receive that opportunity this school year

26,750	Early learning scholarships funded by the Governor and Legislature in the last four years
\$11,068	Amount Minnesota families could save per year in child care costs, if they enrolled in voluntary preK
\$58 million	Amount Minnesota families could save in child care costs under the Governor's plan